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ABSTRACT

Before teachers can effectively use television technology in the classroom, many of their fears and uncertainties regarding the medium must be eliminated. For example, there are no studies indicating that television is nurturing a generation of dependent, passive watchers. Nevertheless, because children do spend one-sixth of their time between birth and age 18 watching television, direct instruction in critical viewing and thinking skills must be provided in the schools. One critical viewing skill is the identification of stereotypes. Students can analyze sex-role stereotypes by making a list of products advertised by women and those advertised by men, and by discussing the setting of the commercials. Age-role stereotypes can be discussed after watching a program that has an older character. A basic format helpful in using television to teach critical reading and thinking skills consists of four steps: (1) presenting students with a well-chosen segment from a television program to give them experience with a provocative event, portrayal, or analysis; (2) leading a discussion that elicits critical thinking from the students; (3) introducing reading selections that students will read silently; and (4) focusing a discussion on the content of the reading selection as well as on the application of the previously discussed critical reading and thinking skills. (Appendixes include a bibliography on television and reading, and sources of information for commercially prepared television curriculum materials.) (HOD)

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Television in the Classroom: Critical Viewing/Thinking Skill Development

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Television in the Classroom: Critical Viewing/Thinking Skill Improvement

A paper presented by

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Long before television was labeled a "vast wasteland", Edward R. Murrow stated "Television can illuminate, instruct, and inspire." Which viewpoint do we as educators hold? Actually, many teachers have not considered the potential use of television in their classrooms. They have not settled the issue of television -- is it a friend or a foe? This paper presents a summary of the research which investigated the relationship between television viewing and reading achievement. On the basis of these findings, we will suggest several classroom applications of television to improve the critical viewing and thinking skills of students.

Teacher Questions: Research Answers

Before teachers can effectively use the television technology in the classroom, many of their fears and uncertainities regarding the medium must be eliminated. The following questions are often asked by teachers as they explore the effects of television on their pupils. The findings of relevant studies are summarized after each question.

1. By the time a teenager graduates from high school, how many hours has he/she spent watching TV?

   Wagner (1980) reported that children spend one-sixth of their time between birth and age 18 watching television. This comes to 20,000 hours in front of the screen, as opposed to 11,000 in the classroom.

2. How many hours per week, on the average, does an elementary school age child watch TV?

   The average entering six-year-old brings 5,000 hours of television with him/her to first grade (Larrick, 1975). The average elementary school age child watches 3½ hours a day. Heavy viewers watch 5 hours a day.

3. When do children stop watching so much television?

The most intense viewing period for most children occurs during grades four, five and six. This heavy involvement peaks in grade seven (age 12) for the high-ability students (Busch, 1978). They then turn more to reading. The low-ability students, however, remain dedicated viewers and do not make the transition to reading. For these students the television becomes a primary source of information about the world, current affairs, local issues, and even insights of a personal and social nature.

4. How many parents monitor or control the viewing habits of their children?

This number changes as the child ages. In the primary grades, 33 1/3 percent of parents allow their children to watch any program they wish; 57 percent in grades four through six (Busch, 1978); and almost no control in junior and senior high.

5. How many junior high students would agree that if a story were on television and in a book, they would rather watch the story on television?

This figure also changes with age. When given a choice of viewing a story on television or reading the same story, 74 percent of the fourth-graders studied chose TV (Busch, 1978). Of the seventh graders studied, 77 percent said they would rather watch the story than read the book. Only the high ability students in this sample preferred to read the story.

6. How many junior high students would agree that at least one story on TV has caused them to follow it up by reading a book?

Of those same seventh graders who would rather watch than read, 89 percent admitted that at least one television program had caused them to follow it up by reading a book (Busch, 1978). Other studies also indicate the popularity of TV tie-ins (books related to either TV shows or characters) among junior and senior high school students, especially problem readers.

7. What is the most influential factor in the amount of television viewing of elementary children?

A study of third, fourth, and fifth graders by Singer, Zuckerman and Singer (1980) found that the parents' viewing habits had more influence on their children's viewing than the child's I.Q., or the parents economic or educational levels.

8. Does television viewing, particularly heavy viewing of action-adventure programs, relate to agression in children?

Many studies have found positive correlations between television viewing and the occurrence of aggressive behavior in elemtnary and adolescent children. TV viewing of action-adventure programs has also been found to relate significantly to children's aggressive acts in nursery school (Singer, and Singer, 1980).

9. Does excessive televiewing cause children to become passive and dependent?

In addition to violence, we also fear that TV may be nurturing a generation of dependent, passive watchers. However, no studies indicate that this is true. Schramm (1961) has pointed out that "What children do with television comes down to what they bring television". Television can help bring out dependency in a dependent-prone personality, but cannot cause it.

10. How many tenth graders consider the characters depicted on television as realistic?

One study revealed that one-third of tenth graders actually believed that people seen on television act like "real" people (Corder-Bolz, 1979).

A Sample Lesson

Because of such heavy television viewing among children and adolescents, direct instruction in critical viewing and thinking skills must be provided in the schools. For example, one essential critical viewing skill is the identification of stereotypes. Stereotyping is the mental process of lumping together members of a group and associating them with particular traits. Stereotyping is closely related to categorizing, whereby labels or categoreis are used

to group objects and events under general headings in an effort to simplify our very complex world. In reality, unproven or untrue universal assertions often become widely accepted without having been carefully thought out. Such acceptance often arises from popular repetition, and may reside primarily on a relatively unconscious level. Due to the general pervasiveness of stereotyping throughout society, its widespread use in both print and television is easily demonstrated. Since both media are only reflections of human perceptions, or misperceptions, students can be led to a deeper awareness of their own unconscious thought processes. Such learning at all grade levels is of both immediate and lasting value.

The first phase of our demonstration lesson is designed to quickly involve and interest students. A brief segment (approximately ten minutes) is shown from Thurber's "The Male Animal," a televised production rich in contrasting stereotypical characters. Prior instructions have directed students to keep a careful eye on the characters, but no clue is given concerning the actual nature of what will be discussed.

When viewing is completed the instructor (using an overhead projector) elicits group reactions to what was seen. "The Male Animal" depicts athletes, for example, as essentially lacking in social grace or sophistication, slowwitted, interested only in sports or women, and completely oriented toward physical action; teachers are seen as lackluster, absent-minded, glasses-wearing and drolly-dressed.

When the listing is completed, the group is asked for a word that is generally used to label such rigid character description. If someone knows "stereotyping," good; if not, it should be supplied.

This general session is followed by the formation of small groups consisting of three or four members. Each group is given copies of a brief reading selection - one-fourth to one page - which is to be read individually. We have used excerpts from such sources as Time, December 22, 1941, which depicts Japanese as having "dogmatic and arrogant" expressions, wearing "hornrimmed spectacles," and "laughing loudly at the wrong times;" a current elementary school reader which abounds in

statements containing sex stereotypes, such as "Sam led, and Helen went after him. Helen held his hand in a hard grip. She was timid in the darkness;" and Uncle Tom's Cabin which characterized Blacks as having "a character essentially unlike the hard and dominant Anglo-Saxon race . . . "

About twenty minutes is allotted to 1) identify any stereotypes within the passages; and 2) discuss their possible origins and uses. Each group then presents the stereotypes they found to the entire class. Discussion of the second aspect, origin and usage, follows with the teacher assuming a role of moderator/facilitator, and recording responses on the overhead or board. The discussion is encouraged to broaden along lines of individual interests and might will include listing stereotypes of which students are personally aware.

A teacher can follow-up this introductory lesson by assigning any of the following activities (Parrish and Thompson, 1982) to counteract the influences of stereotypes.

Activities to analyze sex-role stereotypes:

- Make a list of products advertised by women, and products advertised by men. Discuss the results with the class.
- Discuss the setting in commercials. Where are women usually seen? Where are men usually found?
- Compare a female and male from a popular program (for instance, "Charlie's Angels," "Three's Company," "Dallas") to people they know. What characteristics do they share? How are they different?

Activities to counter age-role stereotyping:

- After showing a program which has an older character ("Rockford Files," "Too Close for Comfort," or "Barney Miller") ask the class to describe that character. Discuss the impressions and compare them to people (perhaps grandparents or uncles and aunts) they know.

- Show "Over Easy," PBS. Compare the information, topics and people on "Over Easy" to the plots and problems of the elderly on other television programs.

Two activities to analyze stereotyping of occupational roles:

- Have the class keep a list of occupations for men and women on television for a week (lawyer, doctor, secretary). How is the character depicted? What attributes does he/she have?
- Make a list of nonstereotypic roles with your class. For instance, a woman lawyer, an elderly policeman, a black architect, a woman painting a house, an old person working.

Activities to offset racial role stereotyping:

- Ask your class to write down the minority group characters they view on television during a week. Their occupations and a few character traits should be listed also. Compare and contrast these descriptions to the Caucasian characters on the same program.
- Watch a program peopled by minority characters with our class (for instance, "Angie," "The Jeffersons," and "Different Strokes"). How do they fit or differ from the stereotyped image of their ethnic group?

The way children see men and women, young and old, occupations and minority groups is affected by the direct and indirect influence of television. Television can give a distorted view or it can widen one's vision. Critical viewing skills concerning such structures as stereotyping need to be taught in order to maximize the advantages and potential of television.

GENERATING MORE IDEAS

We would like to suggest a basic format for using television to teach critical reading and thinking skills. The format consists of four basic steps:

1. A provocative event, portrayal or analysis is experienced by the students. A well chosen segment from a television program easily

provides the desired experiences.

2. The teacher leads a discussion which elicits critical thinking from the students. The focus of the discussion is on both the content of the experience (e.g. the television segment) and the process of critical thinking.
3. Reading selections are introduced by the teacher and read silently by the students.
4. The teacher continues to lead a discussion. The focus this time is on the content of the reading selections as well as the application of the critical reading/thinking skills discussed previously.

Some other critical reading/thinking skills which are easily taught by this method are (1) investigating sources, (2) recognizing the author's (writer's) purpose, (3) distinguishing fact from opinion, and (4) detecting propaganda devices. Almost any television segment can be used, but the selection must be appropriate for the skill. ABC World News Tonight (an interview with a lawyer on the topic of the insanity plea), That's Hollywood (a look at how boys meet girls in the movies), and Creativity with Bill Moyers (a view of the working life of garbage-men), have been used successfully by the authors.

Network Materials Presented

Various Scripts matched - to - broadcast are available from the following networks and companies: A few provide study guides and teacher guides with lesson questions and ideas.

NBC Television Network/NBC Viewer's Guide Program, Cultural Information Service, P.O. Box 92, N.Y., N.Y. 10156

CBS Television Reading Program, Jack Blessington (Director of Educational Relations), 51 West 52 Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10019

ABC Television Network, Pamela N. Warford-Director of Community Relations, 1330 Avenue of the Americas, N.Y., N.Y. 10019

Capital Cities TV Reading Program, Dr. Michael McAndrew (Director of Educational Services), 4100 City Line Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19131

A variety of materials are available in conjuction with several PBS programs. A few include:

Children's Television Workshop, 1 Lincoln Plaza, N.Y., N.Y. 10023
(Sesame Street, The Electric Company, 3-2-1 Contact)

Studio See, SC-ETV, Columbia, S.C. 29250

PBS Television Network (Contact local PBS stations)

NOVA, WGBH Boston, 125 Western Avenue, Boston, MA 02134

For information on upcoming programs and educational suggestions for their use, contact The Parent Participation TV Workshop Project, (Teacher's/Parent's Guides to TV), 699 Madison Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10021

Television Curriculum Materials Presented - Commercial

Inside Television - Includes ten high school student learning units on subjects of viewing behavior, news, regulation, technology, etc.

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, CA 94103

Critical Television Viewing Work-A-Text - Includes television viewing skills/ language arts curriculum via student worktext, teacher's guide and parent guides, developed by WNET.

The Basic Skills Company, 888 Seventh Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10019

Television and Values - Includes a filmstrip, a game "TV on Trial", project cards, book TV Action Book, TV monitoring form, Teacher's guide and TV Sponsor directory.

Learning Seed Company, 145 Brentwood, Palatice, ILL 60067

Channel - A kit including a filmstrip/cassette, individualized activity cards coded by ability level, content area usage, and critical viewing skill. Appropriate for junior high and high school students.

Educational Activities, Inc., Freeport, N.Y. 11520

TV: Behind the Tube - A book from the popular Co[illegible]act series for junior and senior high school students.

Scholastic Book Services, 904 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632

Critical TV Viewing Skills - Includes a workshop manual for teachers, Teacher cue cards, books related to TV, TV log, and game as well as parent materials. Developed for kindergarten to fifth grade.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 E. Seventh Street, Austin, Texas

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